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ABSTRACT

Situational socialization goals were investigated as determinants of parental choice of disciplinary technique. It was predicted that parents would tend to use techniques such as reasoning when they had long-term compliance goals for their children and power-assertive techniques when they had short-term compliance goals. A total of 64 mothers and their 4-year-old children participated in an experiment in which mothers were asked to influence their children to perform a monotonous task. In the experimental manipulation, mothers in the long-term compliance condition were told that their children's compliance would be observed first in their presence and later in their absence; mothers in the short-term compliance condition were informed only that the compliance test would occur in their presence. Results showed that mothers in the long-term goal condition behaved in a more nurturing fashion and used more reasoning and character attributions than did mothers in the short-term condition. Although no differences in the use of power-assertive strategies as a function of goal orientation were found, power assertion was used more with boys than with girls. Children in the long-term condition were more cooperative and less verbally negativistic in the presence of their mothers and cooperated more in the absence of their mothers than did children in the short-term condition. Implications of the findings for models of parent/child interaction were considered. (Author/RH)

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Socialization Goals and Mother-Child Interaction:

Mothers' Strategies for Long-Term and Short-Term Compliance

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Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Detroit, April 1983.

Abstract

Situational socialization goals were investigated as determinants of parental choice of disciplinary techniques. It was hypothesized that parents' choice of strategy may be influenced by the kinds of goals they have when intervening to control a child's behavior. It was predicted that parents would tend to use techniques such as reasoning when they have long-term compliance goals (compliance in the parents' absence) for their children and power assertive techniques when they have short-term compliance goals (compliance in the parents' presence). Sixty-four mothers and their 4-year-old children participated in an experiment in which mothers' were asked to influence their children to perform a monotonous task. Mothers's perceptions of the long-term or short-term compliance required of their children were varied, and the effects of these perceptions on subsequent interactions were assessed. Mothers in the long-term goal condition behaved more nurturantly and used more reasoning and character attributions than mothers in the short-term condition. Although no differences in the use of power assertive strategies as a function of goal orientation were found, power assertion was used more with boys than with girls. Children in the long-term condition were more cooperative and less verbally negativistic in mothers' presence and cooperated more in mothers' absence than in the short-term condition. The implications of the findings for models of parent-child interaction were discussed.

Socialization Goals and Mother-Child Interaction: Mothers' Strategies for Long-Term and Short-Term Compliance

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Research on parental discipline and control practices suggests that middle-class parents draw upon large repertoires of techniques and strategies for influencing children's behavior (e.g., Clifford, 1959; Grusec & Kuczynski, 1980). Depending on the situation or on the nature of a child's transgressions, the same parent will use power assertive strategies--force, punishment, unexplained commands--on some occasions and more cognitive approaches such as reasoning and induction on others. However, little is known about the implications of these situational variations for either parental functioning or for children's development.

A cognitive perspective of parental functioning was adopted in the present study. It is assumed that situations arouse in parents specific goals for influencing their children's behavior. Situational variations in control techniques may reflect parents' attempts to choose strategies in a manner that is appropriate to their goals for changing children's behavior in specific situations.

This study investigated two kinds of socialization goals--goals for short-term compliance and goals for long-term compliance as determinants of parental choice of discipline. The most frequently occurring interactions with young children probably arouse short-term compliance goals in parents. The usual purpose of parental interventions is not to exert a long-lasting contol over behavior or to have their children internalize a behavioral principle. Instead, it is assumed that their goal is for children to do or not do something

immediately in their presence.

In other situations, in addition to being concerned about immediate compliance, parents may also wish to establish a more enduring form of compliance in their children. One class of long-term compliance goal maybe evoked by children's transgressions that are intrinsically wrong either because they constitute violations against the values of society or because the behavior is physically dangerous or otherwise has implications for the child's future functioning. Other long-term goals may involve behaviors that do not have an intrinsically proscriptive basis but over which parents, in particular situations, wish to to establish a control that will endure for a time beyond the immediate situation. For example, parents may want their children to comply with a command in their absence when children's behavior cannot be directly monitored.

Research suggests that different control techniques may differ in their effectiveness for promoting long-term and short-term compliance. Reasoning has been found to be more effective than power assertion in promoting long-term compliance (e.g., Hoffman, 1970; Parke, 1969; Kuczynski, 1983). Power assertion has been found to be particularly effective in promoting immediate compliance (e.g., Lytton & Zwirner, 1975). It is proposed that parents learn from experience to choose techniques on the basis of their effectiveness for particular purposes. The specific hypothesis is that parents use techniques such as power assertion when they wish to establish a short-term control over behavior. They are more likely to use techniques such as reasoning when they wish to establish a more internalized or enduring control over behavior.

Some indirect support for this hypothesis can be derived from several studies that have analyzed parental choice of technique as a function of the

content of children's transgressions (e.g., Grusec & Kuczynski, 1980; Nucci & Turiel, 1978; Zahn-Waxler & Chapman, 1982). Transgressions that involve long-term socialization issues are more likely to elicit reasoning than transgressions that involve short-term compliance issues. One objective of the present study was to test directly the hypothesis that long- and short-term compliance goals elicit different patterns of control strategies in parents. An experiment was performed that directly varied mothers' perceptions of their socialization goals and examined the influence of these perceptions on subsequent mother-child interaction. The second purpose of the study was to assess the effects of mothers' strategies on children's behavior. Two criteria of effectiveness were used, "short-term compliance" in mothers' presence and "long-term compliance" in mothers' absence. It was predicted that the pattern of strategies elicited by the long-term goal would be more effective in mothers' absence but that the strategies used in the short-term condition would be more effective for promoting compliance in mothers' presence.

Table 1 about here

The design of the experiment is illustrated in Table 1. Sixty-four mothers and their 4-year old children participated as subjects. When they arrived at the laboratory the children played with an attractive assortment of toys while mothers received instructions in another room. All mothers were told that the study investigated how parents influence their children to cooperate on a task and avoid distraction. The task was a tedious one--sorting a large box of plastic spoons and forks. The distraction consisted of the toys in the room. The experimental manipulation consisted in this: Mothers in the long-term compliance condition were told that their children's compliance would be observed first in mothers' presence and later on in their absence

as well. Mothers in the short-term compliance condition were informed only of the compliance test in mothers' presence. The critical difference between the two conditions was that only mothers in the long-term condition were made aware that there would be a future test of their children's compliance in their absence.

After the experimental manipulation, mothers returned to their children and were given the opportunity to play freely with them for four minutes. In Phase 4, the experimenter brought in the box of spoons and forks to be sorted. During the next five minutes, measures were taken of mothers' influence techniques and children's immediate compliance. In Phase 5 mothers were called to the door and were told that their children would next be observed working alone. Mothers' departing remarks to their children an children's behavior were recorded at this time. In Phase 6, children's compliance during mothers' absence was observed for 5 minutes. The entire session was videotaped.

How did the manipulation of mothers' goal orientation influence the subsequent mother-child interaction? Table 2 describes mothers' behaviors.

Table 2 about here

Mothers in the long-term condition prepared their children for the compliance task by interacting more nurturantly with them during free play. As predicted, mothers in the long-term condition used more reasoning. Significant differences in use of reasoning were found within 30 seconds of the beginning of the interaction. In the 5-minute interaction, as a whole, reasoning was more frequent and more complex in the long-term condition.

Some unpredicted differences were also found. Mothers in the long-term condition used more positive character attributions (e.g., "You are a great

helper", "You are mommy's friend", "You are so smart"). This is interesting because recent research (e.g., Miller, Brickman, & Bolen, 1975; Grusec & Redler, 1980) suggests that character attributions may promote more enduring effects than simple verbal reinforcement.

There were also subtle differences in mothers' use of distraction techniques. Mothers in the short-term condition kept children's attention focused on the task by labelling or counting the utensils as children sorted, whereas mothers in the long-term condition used more off-task conversation.

The prediction that mothers in the short-term condition would be more power assertive was not confirmed. There were no main effects for goal-orientation on measures of power assertion such as commands, attention mands, aversive consequences, and bargains. However, there were sex differences on each of these measures. Mothers used more power assertion with boys than with girls.

Table 3 about here

In Table 3 children's behaviors during the interaction are described. Children's behaviors provided an indication of the effectiveness of mothers' strategies in the two condtions. The strategies used by mothers in the long-term condition were more effective than the short-term strategies both in the long run, as predicted, and also in the short run. Children in the short-term condition worked less and were distracted more and boys in the short-term condition were more verbally negativistic in mother's presence. Both boys and girls were more negativistic during mothers' departure from the room, and complied less in mother's absence than children in the long-term condition.

I would like to draw two implications from these findings. This study provides preliminary evidence that there may be two domains of parental

disciplinary practices--strategies for short-term compliance and strategies for long-term compliance. Parental use of reasoning, in particular, is implicated as a long-term strategy. The evidence includes the use of different patterns of strategies as a function of mothers' socialization goals and the differential effectiveness of their techniques for promoting long-term compliance.

This has implications for the assessment of parental disciplinary practices. A frequent method for assessing control practices in problem families is the direct observation of interaction in home and laboratory settings. To the extent that the interactions are heavily sampling short-term compliance issues, I think that assessments of parents' short-term strategies are being made. Potentially, important disruptions in parental discipline practices may also occur in the domain of long-term strategies and it may be useful to develop assessments of parent-child interactions under conditions in which parents have long-term goals.

A second implication concerns the finding that strategies used by mothers in the short-term condition were relatively ineffective, even on measures of short-term compliance. If techniques such as reasoning are more effective for promoting compliance in mothers' presence, why weren't they used as much by mothers who had a short-term goal orientation? Perhaps one problem with the initial hypotheses of this study was that mothers were assumed to choose techniques planfully in all situations. It may be more likely that parents planfully choose techniques in some situations but react more automatically and unconsciously in others. Mothers may choose techniques carefully, perhaps on the basis of their effectiveness for a particular goal, if the compliance issues are unusual or serious enough. However, in frequently occurring interactions where mothers are present to monitor children's behaviors, mothers may behave more automatically and rely on unelaborated power assertion even at the cost of some noncompliance in children.

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TABLE 1

MOTHERS' STRATEGIES FOR IMMEDIATE AND LONG-TERM COMPLIANCE

PROCEDURES

PHASE 1: Mother and child introduced to E1 and child begins playing

PHASE 2: Mother is briefed by E2

Child plays with E1

PHASE 3: Mother and child play (4 min)

PHASE 4: Mother and child work (5 min)

PHASE 5: Mother departs

PHASE 6: Child works alone (7 min)

PHASE 7: Mother returns

OVERVIEW OF DESIGN

MOTHERS' EXPECTATION		MOTHER & CHILD	MOTHER DEPARTS	CHILD ALONE
	LONG TERM	M's Techniques C's Compliance	M's Instructions C's Negativism	C's Compliance
	SHORT TERM	M's Techniques C's Compliance	M's Instructions C's Negativism	C's Compliance

TABLE 2

MOTHERS' STRATEGIES FOR LONG-TERM AND SHORT-TERM COMPLIANCE

	Socialization Goal		
	Long-Term	Short-Term	
Positive behaviors during free play	5.53	2.84	$p < .01$
Reasoning in first 30 seconds	1.13	0.59	$p < .05$
Total complexity of reasoning	3.09	2.09	$p < .05$
Positive reinforcement	4.34	4.63	
Positive character attribution	1.13	0.50	$p < .05$
Labels, counts while working	5.41	10.03	$p < .10$
Non-Task Conversation	5.78	3.09	$p < .05$
Commands[1]	16.88	17.06	
Attention Mands[1]	4.28	5.16	
Aversive consequences[1]	1.50	2.09	
Bargain[1]	2.09	1.56	
Total speech acts[1]	69.09	70.50	

[1] Main effects for sex of child. Males > Females (ps ranging from .10 to .01)

TABLE 3

CHILDREN'S BEHAVIORS AS A FUNCTION OF MOTHERS' GOAL ORIENTATION

	Mothers' Socialization Goal		
	Long-Term	Short-Term	
Compliance Test-Mother Present			
% of time working	70.80	60.90	$p < .05$
% of time distracted by tovs	13.80	17.30	$p < .10$
Verbal negativism	1.13	4.63	$p < .01$ males
Postive assertive behaviors	7.53	4.50	$p < .05$
Mother Departs			
Verbal negativism	0.53	1.41	$p < .05$
Duration of departure episode (sec.)	19.44	28.47	$p < .10$
Compliance Test-Mother Absent			
% of time working	45.20	31.20	$p < .05$
% of time distracted by toys	44.30	58.80	$p < .10$